



No. CCXX.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 1847.



WHEN the council of the Institute of Architects announced, in June last, the terms of the competition for the medal granted by the Queen for the promotion of

architecture, we protested against the limitation of the age of competitors to twenty-five years.* We reminded the council that they had, in their circular advertisement of the subjects proposed for the medals of the Institute, and the Soane medallion, pointed out that the object of the Institute was, not merely to draw the attention of students and the younger members of the profession to the subjects proposed for the prize essays, but, "to enlist the experience, the judgment, and the taste, of those profoundly acquainted with the several departments of the art, whether members of the Institute or not;" and we then made the following remark.

"The Institute wish very properly to enlist the experience and the judgment of practised men; but the medal graciously presented by the Sovereign to advance the art and science of architecture—the greatest honour they have to bestow—is not to be opened to such candidates. The council should have ennobled this medal to the utmost, and made it open to all, so that, like the corresponding medal given by the Royal Society, it might be an object of ambition to the most eminent in the profession. Architecture has few or no honours. By the course pursued, they are not only throwing away the opportunity of creating one, but are actually, as will be found in practice, lowering the worth of their other medals."

Further consideration has made the correctness of our first view of the question more evident, and now comes the result of the advertisement to clinch it.

And a melancholy result it is. A result we must confess, much worse than might reasonably be expected; inasmuch as we ought to find plenty of men of four or five-and-twenty capable of designing a building suitable to the purposes of the Royal Institute of British Architects, comprising lecture-room, library, gallery for casts and fragments, &c. not to exceed in cost 20,000*l.*, which, as our readers may remember, was the subject proposed to competitors. The reward, too, was certainly a tempting one; for, be it remembered, in addition to the royal gold medal,—the first royal gold medal awarded in England for the advancement of architecture, with all the prestige it will give,—the successful competitor will be entitled to draw upon the treasurer of the Institute for the sum of 50*l.* after his arrival in Rome, in pursuit of his professional studies, at any period within five years from the time of the medal having been awarded to him, upon sending to the Institute a satisfactory study of some existing building, either ancient or modern.

This, we repeat, was a tempting offer, and ought to have produced a number of emulative competitors, and some fine fresh bold thoughts, well set forth on paper, to show that the rising generation of architects intended doing something more than blindly copy the orders

and repeat worn-out precedents, without thought of principles.

We are not amongst those who look for great and sudden changes in style; we do not expect to find architects employing details never before met with, or producing at once, as with the blow of harlequin's wand in a pantomime, a building altogether different from others already erected. As we have often said, the history of architecture is the history of a progress. A number of modifications and adaptations to circumstances, scarcely perceptible, singly, concur to produce gradually a change which can be chronicled. It requires many inventive minds, and many years, to evolve a new style in architecture.

What we do expect, however, is, that architects will recombine rather than repeat,—that they will give the most perfect and commodious arrangement for the purpose of the building, and be able to carry it out with the most proper materials and economy; that this purpose shall be fittingly and, in proportion to the means at their disposal, magnificently expressed; that the proportions shall be harmonious, whether the building be costly or simple, and the adornments strictly in character; in short, that in all the arrangements for utility, the development of the beautiful be never lost sight of.

The sets of designs submitted for the royal medal are eleven in number. One, with the motto *Tenet Deus clavum*, is a mere piece of impertinence; and there is one other, if not two, which is little better. Three or four are very creditable drawings, though far beneath what we looked for, and the remainder call for no remark. There is a creditable attempt to obtain a monumental character for the building. In one of the designs, and the interior arrangement of a second is satisfactory; but the defects in all are so great (if the proper standard be kept in mind), the want of any thing like genius is so apparent, that comparison is unnecessary, as we cannot think the council will feel themselves justified in awarding the prize on this occasion.

To give the author of either of the designs submitted fifty pounds would be a sad misapplication of the Society's funds; but to bestow upon him the royal medal would at once destroy the value of that medal, and would be a public injury of very serious character. We are most anxious that this medal should be regarded as an honour worth striving for by every member of the profession; that obtaining it should give a reputation; and we therefore hope that the council will refuse to award it on the present occasion, and will in their next advertisement withdraw the limitation of age. We would further suggest that on alternate years, it should be offered for the best essay on a subject to be named.

CONDITION AND IMPROVEMENT OF CHESTER.

CHESTER, like other places, we are happy to say, is arousing itself to the importance of sanitary improvements, and certainly no town with which we are acquainted stands more in need of them. The statistical returns of the Registrar general shew that it does not do to depend entirely upon the good natural drainage alone, with which the fair city has been bountifully blest by Providence, as the neglect of artificial drainage entails a fearful sacrifice of the energies, the health, and even the lives of a great proportion of the community annually. Steps are now being taken to carry out an efficient system of sewerage upon a comprehensive plan, under the powers of the Improvement Act recently come into operation, and we shall look forward with confidence to the beneficial results to be derived from such a

salutary measure, both in an economical and sanitary point of view, although many of that class termed of the "old school," are disposed to question its utility. Nevertheless, we are not so sanguine as to hope that the measure of sanitary reform, which we have from time to time so strongly advocated, will prove the panacea to all the "ills that flesh is heir to," without it is followed up by measures that have a tendency to check the practice of adulterating many of the necessities of life, now so extensively prevalent.

In a former article upon this subject, we lamented over the apathy displayed by the authorities of towns with reference to sanitary improvements, and regretted, that as a nation of mechanics, and anxious to maintain that character, so little sterling science had been brought to bear upon the question, in which every member of the community was interested, both high and low, rich and poor.

Great evils are caused in this city by the constant disturbance of the streets for the purpose of repairing or relaying water or gas pipes, which is evident from a casual inspection of the cross sections of the surfaces. Our observations confirm us in the belief, that the time has arrived when some other plan must be devised for that purpose, and that subways or tunnels must be used for sewers, water, and gas pipes, or that the water and gas pipes must be banished the middle of the streets, and placed at the back of the curb-stone of the footways on each side, with a double row of mains, so that when sewers are once constructed, the middle of the streets may never be disturbed, or left, as at present, to the tender mercy of water or gas companies. And this leads us to the consideration of the construction of the roadways of streets; some better and more durable system is urgently called for, for when the arch enemies, sewage commissioners, water and gas companies, are banished, the excuse of an imperfect road surface ought not and must not be admitted, but we fear that until there is some change made, the public will have to submit, though with murmurings loud and deep. Upon this subject we shall speak at greater length at a future period.

Trapping drains by water alone, it seems clear, as already mentioned, is not effectual in its character; we are open to receive any plan that may be suggested as an efficient remedy. We are glad to hear the wretched foot pavements of this venerable city are to be replaced with flags, so that the sojourner, and he that is troubled with corns, may traverse the streets with as much ease and comfort as the "rows" and walls that bear the stamp of imperial Rome. This wise measure will, further, have a direct tendency to improve the health of the city.

The water supplied to the citizens on the intermittent system, we are sorry to say, is impure in quality, and inefficient in quantity, and is pumped up from the river Dee, and conveyed at once to the tanks of the consumers without being filtered or directed of any of its impurities, and there are neither reservoirs nor filters attached to the works. Two serious fires have recently occurred there; fortunately the one was situated near the Chester and Ellesmere Canals, the other near the River Dee, where a copious supply of water was obtained, but although a fire-plug was within a few feet of the former premises, it was not used, because it was stated there was no water on in the main; so if a fire were to occur in the middle of this city amongst the old timber buildings, under such a system, the consequences must be disastrous. No town with which we are acquainted is so well situated for a copious and good supply of pure water as Chester, and if the constant supply under high-pressure system was adopted, fire-engines might be dispensed with, and stand-pipes and hose applied directly to the mains, which would throw a greater volume of water than could possibly be done with engines; and if fire-plugs were more numerous, and hose and stand-pipes at depôts in every street, we should seldom hear of fires so destructive in their character as have recently been recorded by the press.

A discussion has lately taken place in the council on the supply of gas, a new company having been projected for the obvious purpose of supplying gas at a cheaper rate than that charged by the old company, viz., 8*s.* per thousand feet, but the permission of the council to break up the streets was refused, because the

* See Vol. IV., p. 368 and p. 328.